

Sports Help Break Cycle of Violence in Jamaica

KINGSTON, Jamaica—When the murder rate in Jamaica soared recently, one of most dangerous districts was Grants Pen in Kingston, a crowded, inner city neighborhood of 7,000 with sharp turf boundaries, gang rivalry, and tensions between residents and the police.

But a \$3 million Peace and Prosperity

Project provided by USAID is helping change life in Grants Pen. Residents are learning to reduce violence through mediation and cultivate skills that have helped many find private sector jobs or set up their own businesses.

The work involves the Jamaican

Constabulary Force, the Dispute Resolution Foundation, several educational facilities, the private sector, churches, and community groups.

The first major breakthrough came with a community sports day that brought together more than 500 Grants Pen residents, including some from Morgan's Lane, which has the worst reputation for violence. Though no police or security personnel were present, the day went by without incident.

The event had such an impact that residents of Morgan's Lane signed a peace treaty with the rest of the community that was commemorated by the painting of a mural.

Since then, much more progress has been made. Recognizing how sports brought the community together, leaders of area churches won approval for a USAID-supported community-wide soccer competition.

It brought together more than 500 boys and young men, aged 10–19, who were taught soccer, along with vital social skills on and off the field.

"I saw the USAID program as a godsend," says the Reverend Ian Muirhead, who headed the competition. "What USAID has done is to give us an avenue to help heal the community and to help our children."

The ministers, coaches, parents, participants, and many others living and working in Grants Pen have all learned from these sports

training events.

"You would not believe the response we are getting," said Norris Jackson, a community leader. "Before this program, people were very skeptical. Now they are beginning to believe."

"There is a lot more to do. But we are seeing change everyday and people are now living in hope. What is most important is that the community is coming together to determine its future."

NORRIS JACKSON

Even the business community is paying attention: some merchants are returning to Grants Pen, and those already there are investing more in the community.

The USAID project supports Jamaican government plans to reduce crime and foster better community and police relations. USAID and the government are working to create a model community service center. ★

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Grants Pen soccer teams line up and show off their new uniforms. The USAID-sponsored competition has defused local tensions.